SHARING THE FUTURE

Choosing a Non-religious
Wedding Ceremony

MARRIAGE

Marriage joins two people who trust the love that they have found. It is a partnership in which each can grow and be their true selves, while also becoming part of the other. It expresses the confidence that human warmth and dedication to the well-being of each other can overcome whatever the future may hold.

The wedding day is one of the most important of life's milestones. You are asking your families and friends to share your happiness and witness your expression of commitment to each other. It needs to be celebrated in a way which is true to your ideals and aspirations, and which will provide strength and inspiration for the rest of your lives, as well as many happy memories.

A RELIGIOUS SERVICE?

Those for whom religion is an important part of their everyday life will wish to be married according to the practice of their particular faith.

Clearly the wedding day is a time above all others for sincerity and truth. Though of great significance to believers, some couples will find the sentiments expressed in a church foreign to their view of life and the way they see their relationship. In that case, they will probably be reluctant to be the central figures in a religious observance which holds little meaning for them.

For some people the religion option does not exist anyway, because their personal circumstances are judged unacceptable by many religions.

THE REGISTER OFFICE?

In many countries all marriages must be registered separately with the civil authorities, whatever other ceremony may take place. It is only for historical reasons that in the UK the right to effect legal marriages was also granted to churches.

Registrars must use a form of words which applies to everyone. So, despite their best efforts, a civil marriage in a Register Office is not an occasion when important values and emotions can be fully expressed, or when you can yourselves decide what is said and done.

A HUMANIST CEREMONY

More and more couples find themselves wanting a third choice; and more inspiring than the Register Office.

A Humanist wedding is just such an occasion. This alternative is available to all who genuinely want to make a serious commitment to share their lives, whatever their beliefs or backgrounds.

The ceremony can take place in any suitable setting, indoors or outdoors. It will often be in a hotel or garden, but it could just as well be on a hilltop, in a bluebell wood, or by the sea. You can choose, with our help, the words to be spoken and the music to be played. There is a wealth of poetry and readings about human love and the family, and some of these might be included, together with more formal sentences to express your commitment. You may like to say something yourselves, or ask a relative or friend either to speak or to contribute some music.

No two Humanist wedding ceremonies are the same because each is composed to reflect the wishes and personalities of every couple individually.

Couples with children often arrange a ceremony in which their children take part, sometimes combining the wedding with a naming ceremony. Humanists also recognize that partners of the same sex may wish to express their commitment to each other in a ceremony, just as heterosexual couples do.

It must be remembered that, under the present law, a couple who choose a Humanist ceremony must register their marriage at a

Register Office as well. This can be looked upon as a legal formality, while the Humanist ceremony is the real wedding.

WHO ARE HUMANISTS?

Humanists care deeply about moral issues, but from a non-religious viewpoint. Humanism continues a tradition which has existed for over 2,500 years, and which flourishes today in many countries.

We believe strongly in the good within human beings, and in the individual's right to freedom of choice in the main decisions of life and death. All people are of equal worth regardless of sex, culture, age or race, and we must find solutions for the future from within ourselves rather than rely on any supernatural intervention.

One of our activities is to help people with the creation of non-religious ceremonies to mark the principal milestones in their lives, namely birth, marriage and death, and to provide trained men and women who, if you wish, can officiate for you on the day.

Humanist celebrants come from a variety of backgrounds, and they have a flexibility and openness of approach to life which many people find refreshing and reassuring. It is not their purpose to moralize or preach.

PLANNING THE CEREMONY

It is, of course, wise to begin to make plans well in advance of the wedding day, if possible, in order to be sure that your choice of time and place suits everyone, and to allow for thorough preparation. You will want to meet and talk with your local celebrant before you decide to entrust your ceremony to him or her, because it is important that you all feel comfortable with one another.

Your celebrant will be happy to advise you on the structure and content of the ceremony, and to show you examples of what other people have chosen to do. If you wish, he or she can prepare and present the whole ceremony for you. Many couples, though, find

that their ideas develop as a result of discussing the possibilities, and they enjoy taking an active part in the creation of their own personal occasion.

Music helps to give the right atmosphere, and deserves careful thought. Whether you have live or recorded music, classical or popular, the choice is enormous.

COST

Celebrants will normally request a fee for what they do, though the amount can vary depending on the time needed, distances to be travelled, and so on. It is a good idea to discuss the question of a fee at your first meeting with the celebrant.

WHAT MIGHT OTHERS THINK?

The kind of wedding ceremony you choose must, first of all, be right for you. However, there are likely to be relatives and friends present for whom a non-religious wedding may still be something new. Our experience shows that, if your words express responsibility and integrity, everyone will respect you, whatever their own beliefs.

People often say afterwards how sincere and fitting they found the ceremony. Remember, too, that by preparing and rehearsing everything in detail beforehand, you know that the occasion will be just as you want it to be.

Your Humanist Contact is:

Alternatively, you can ring our helpline for ceremonies on 0990 168122.

The BHA publishes a comprehensive booklet for anyone thinking of arranging a non-religous wedding. It is called *Sharing the Future* and contains practical guidelines, several sample ceremonies, and a selection of suitable prose and verse.
It costs £4.50, plus 50p postage, and is available from:

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